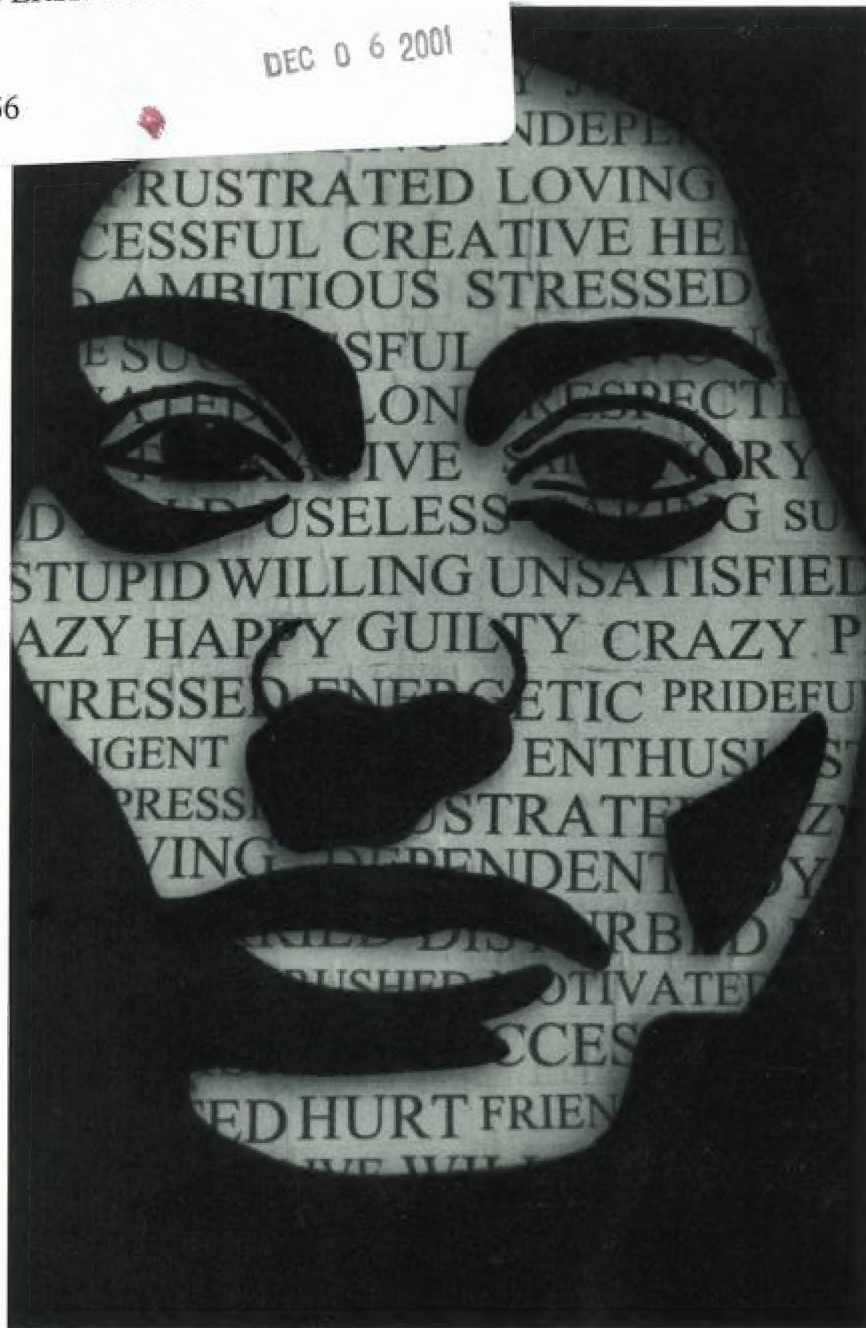


The Minstrel

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Redeemer University College's Poetry and Fiction Magazine
Volume 12, Winter 2001

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“The two most engaging powers of an author; new things are made familiar, and familiar things are made new.”

Samuel Johnson

Editor: Brett Dewing
Assistant Editor: Judith Byl
Faculty Advisor: Hugh Cook

Cover Art: Face Value
 Christina van den Ham

Contest Sponsors: Redeemer Bookstore
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**First Place
Poetry**

Without Thinking

groggy, like coming out of anesthetic, you force your feet onto the frigid floor
habit moves your muscles as you stumble to the washroom, a newborn horse -- unsteady
the water, like vines, tangles over your skin awakening and hot
shampoo mixes with shower steam
rising like incense fragrant, filling the room
you brush your teeth, the flavor of freshness and peppermints in church permeates your mouth
this tunnel of morning routine you walk through
moist and familiar
dark, yet growing lighter
your mute button unsticks itself
noise cascades over you
the angry roar of the flushing toilet, stampeding humans up and down the stairs, sharp
sounds of contiguous cutlery separated, jumbled voices emitting kaleidoscope words
then --

“HURRY UP!”

you exit the tunnel quickly through the front door
morning routine complete
new day
beginning

Ruth Reitsma

The First Death

Her father was a pig farmer, so it was perfectly natural for her to be involved with the lives and the deaths of the pigs. Most people don't have the opportunity to experience the mystery of birth before their eighth birthday, as she did. She rose early in the morning and put on her smelly clothes. She could still see her breath when she walked along the cracked, concrete path to the barn. It took her entire body weight to thrust open the sturdy wooden door, and when she did she was greeted with the ripe odour of pig. Most mornings her dad would beat her to the barn, but this particular morning she was the first intruder. The pigs were sleeping when she entered, and as she turned on the lights they began to wake up and grunt around in their pens. She walked slowly through the aisle, carefully keeping her rubber boots away from the pens. The pigs liked the taste of rubber boots in the morning. She walked past the ladder to the hay mow and past the Boar's pen. She didn't like the Boar. He always smelled peculiar, and he had bulky growths under his bum that made him cranky. Her mother told her later that the growths were taken off most of the pigs when they were piglets and that was what Daddy was doing with the knife when the piglets screamed so loud. As she passed the dirty old Boar, she moved a little faster because she was sure that he must be extra hungry for rubber boots. She rounded the corner and reached her destination. The pen in the corner was filled with soft straw. She climbed onto the metal rungs of the pen to take a closer look at its contents. In the middle of the straw, a swollen sow was groaning and snorting. Two of her legs were pointed up, and the other two were pressed against the straw. Her eyes were closed, and she was breathing in long, strenuous gasps. Her belly was the colour of oatmeal, and the skin was tight and firm. Daddy said the sow was going to have piglets very soon. She stared at the sow until Daddy came to the barn to feed the pigs. He told her that if the sow was going to have the babies he would get her right away. She went back to the house and ate breakfast with the others.

She waited all day for her father to tell her that the sow was ready. When it was time for bed, she begged her mother to let her go to the barn for just a while. Her mother agreed. The girl raced to the barn and pushed through the big door, past the hogs and the boar. The distended animal hadn't moved since the morning. Her eyes were wide open and glassy like black marbles. Her breath was coming out of her hard pink mouth in short gasps. The girl climbed over the metal rungs and settled in the corner of the pen on the straw. She was positioned so that she could stare at the end of the pig. Normally, this part of the pig looked like a pointy piece of flesh, the way she imagined a gnome's ear would look. The ear was usually light pink and the size of a walnut, but now it was red, swollen and pulsing. She stared at the opening for so long that when a tiny cloven hoof pushed its way through, she almost didn't see it. The hoof was red and slimy. As the girl stared, the hoof went back inside the sow and then it came out again, and the rest of the piglet followed. The piglet

squirmed on the straw, trying, within the first few moments of his life, to stand. The umbilical cord was purple and thick, leaving the bloody piglet attached to its mother. The girl reached out gently and pressed her thumb and forefinger onto the lumpy cord close to the piglet. The cord broke easily, and the girl picked up the tiny piglet. She wiped the miniature body with straw and set him at his mother's teat. The piglet shoved his snout greedily into the engorged nipple and began to drink immediately. The sow grunted with approval. By the time the girl moved back to the end of the sow, another piglet had squeezed out and was staggering around the straw. The girl released him from his mother and placed him at another waiting nipple. The girl did this seven more times, each time placing the new baby next to its mother. When the girl positioned herself behind the pig again, she gasped as she watched the afterbirth ooze out of the sow. Her daddy had told her to take this out of the pen with a pitchfork and put it in the gutter, or else the sow would eat it. The girl climbed out of the pen and found a fork near the hay mow. When she returned to the sow's pen, she saw one more tiny piglet laying in the afterbirth. She picked him up, but he wasn't moving. He was half the size of the others. As she was staring at the lifeless body in her hands, her daddy came into the barn. He smiled at the litter drinking happily. As he congratulated the girl, he noticed the runt. The girl's daddy picked up the pitchfork and tossed the afterbirth into the gutter.

"The little one didn't make it, eh Jenny?"

The girl looked at the bloody newborn and then at her daddy. "He just came out dead, Daddy." She held back tears as her daddy took the piglet from her hands and put it in the gutter. The girl's daddy hung a heat lamp over the sow and her nine wriggling babies. The girl was looking intently upon the warm, dry family of ten when her daddy said that now it was really time to go to bed. The girl turned her eyes from the yellow warmth of the pen to the cold dark of the gutter. The dead piglet had sunk into the mire, and, as the girl left for bed, only one, tiny cloven hoof could be seen.

Jenny Noordegraaf

isaac

you rose from the flaming wings of promise
heaven the hatchling
newborn and salted
laughing at the blindness of paternity
shook in an instant ashen corona
and pointed to the sky

Brett Alan Dewing

Heartbeat

Snow swirls thick around him
wheels hit ice, reluctantly
metal folds into mound
glass punctures flesh
screams fill night
blood on snow
Life Support
eyes shuttered
breathing resumes
family squeeze hands
cry tears of thankfulness
that life still continues and
the family circle is still complete.

Metta Van Brugge

Survival Smile

Let us tie the corners of our mouths
To heaven,
So as we fall
The strings will pull us
To look
Upon His grace,
And with this light,
See rainbows through our tears.
The weight of pain
May drown us,
If we do not let heaven
Pull us up.

Walter Miedema

Counterfeit

her words, like
honeyed coatings, on
plastic inscriptions of
dusted albums laid
open for conscious display

she flirts with the items
of store bought tags
torn from the notes
in her grand-
daughter's hand

clothed in the latest
seventy going on thirty
thinned hips
still moulded into
Claiborne and Chanel

she looks down from a
high pillar of salt,
and mocks their
attitudes on cucumbers' costs

coldness drips from
green rectangular icicles
frozen inside

white-washed superiority
bought like rhinestone
bracelets
cheapened by the price
of a Saran-wrapped
airtight heart

suspended on the outskirts
of life looking in
vacant no one's home
the car's out and the
key is buried under a mountain
of fashion magazines

she'll come home again
kiss their eyes
play a song
waltz upstairs
to the attic of her
heart
wash off her make-up
stare in the mirror
nothing

interest earned on a life invested
in fraudulent, valium-laced dreams

Amy Hilborn

Threshold of Transcendence

Are those mad lives over?
The incubating time?
Winter, and the chain of blood--
God, how can I tell?
The vision-- will it soar away,
gone with a mean fast wind?
Leaving me in shadows
of delirious moments past and grim?
 Trudging drunk through heavy mist
 In the sleep of death . . .
No. I grasp it in my heav'n-stretched mind,
and will not look beneath.
I would not want, cry, scream--
but only ask to have the gift
a thousand storms could never flood.
Today and for eternity,
It must be so--
I must
be free.

Tiffany Heerema

Yggdrasil¹ in Frost

“We are accustomed to believe that our world was created by God speaking the Word;
but, I ask, may it not rather be that he wrote it, wrote a Word so long
we have yet to come to the end of it?”

– J. M. Coetzee, *Foe*

Whose words these are I think I know
written on me dripping on me
black with pungent denotations
caking cracking slipping on me
catch a glimpse of where to start
the sprawling twining uberlogue
but sliding glided gilded golden
black to brown and drying molded

I am Shem the Penman²
fresh from my art
rethinking revising
too late these drying
words of waste ... all waste

but the tinny shivering Wind will cleanse
with its wet white
I am waiting waiting

His house is in the village though
and I the woods the words the woulds
searching for an unabridged thesaurus
and a sponge

and there is Odin hanging in his tree³
his power growing though he is thirsty
his eye plucked out at a well as a fee
he will not see me he will not see

below him Vishnu his skin is blue
not seeing mine discolored too
with all that he has yet to do
he is dreaming dreaming⁴

He will not see me stopping here
where the air smells of unstirred coals
and the clouds that hang in the changeless sky
and on the tree there grows a peach
a fruit I do not dare to eat
and Monarch sacs on every leaf
and the sound of bears asleep in caves

and I consumed with my fetid flesh
and all the miles I have yet to go
and the unseen Wind
is wishing wishing

To watch his words fill up with snow
and slowly slowly lowly falling
a heaven-dried melting tear
then flecking flaking flocking down
as wet and white and right and clean
as all the dreams the world can't dream
with shushing hushing flushing
winter whisper in the Wind
it is falling falling
and all my words are running down
between my clothes and
wells with eyes and worms with wings and
dreams and juice and on my skin
beneath the filth the white-won Wind
is writing writing

Brett Alan Dewing

¹In Norse mythology, the worldtree.

²In *Finnegans Wake*, Shem the Penman writes over his entire body with ink made from his bodily wastes.

³In Norse mythology, Odin hanged himself as a sacrifice to himself, thereby increasing his power.

⁴The Hindus believe that Vishnu dreamed the world into existence.



artwork by Jamie Karlson

**Second Place
Poetry**

Star Haiku

Did those who wished on
the star over Bethlehem
get what they wished for?

Anita Brinkman

Buried

"He looks different, doesn't he?"

She lifted her foot and then placed it back down on the same wooden knot. The floor creaked under its pressure. All churches were the same.

The sun's rays struggled through the stained glass windows, casting little rainbows on the dark, pine walls. As she rocked back and forth in her seat, her neck ached from forcing her stare to remain on her shoes. A frown creased her forehead and deepened the hollows of her cheeks.

"Why do they put that much make-up on him? It makes him look like a girl."

Humming to herself inside her head, she endeavoured to block out the surrounding atmosphere. How long would it take to count to infinity using sheep?

"Aren't you ever going to look at him?"

She turned her head away, defiantly looking at the closed door of the sanctuary.

"I know you want to leave, but you're not being fair. You'll never deal with this if you don't look at him." His voice was getting louder and his presence bigger as his body loomed in front of her.

"Sheridan, c'mon, just look at him. It'll help. Hey, I'll even hold your hand, now that's something." He laughed, but his laughter sounded foreign and hurt her ears. Why would he laugh? What was wrong with him? Didn't he care?

"Leave me alone." Sheridan's voice came out in a low growl as she clamped her fingers together. "I just want to leave. You know I hate churches, why should I like them now?" Her head throbbed from the smell of musty hymnals and old carpets.

"Damn it Sheridan, don't you ever feel?"

She shrugged his hand off her shoulder. Crossing her arms against her breasts, she felt her body tremble. I hate it here, I hate it here, I hate it here. Her foot tapped against the floor as she chanted in her mind.

She watched him walk to the window. Da would have understood. He knew her better than anyone.

"Why did I have to bring you here? I knew that you wouldn't be able to handle it," he mumbled to himself, straightening his tie. "Mum thought it would be best for us to deal with it this way, before the others came. But look at you; you're still in denial."

She twisted her pale freckled finger around a loose strand of hair. Her stomach was starting to make protests, and yet she didn't feel hungry at all. She wondered what he'd do if she just ran out of here. Da would understand, he knew she hated it here. He wouldn't force her to look at that strange, ugly ghost. He understood her.

"Mum was right. I'm going to have to be the strong one as usual. I'm going to have to take charge. Me. How could you be any help to me if you can't even face him? Can you?" He walked towards her again, his voice cutting into her soul.

He knew where to attack. He knew her weaknesses.

"Why do you hate me so much?" she whispered. Her black eyes sought his.

"I don't. Now don't be a brat. I just want you to be able to face your ghosts and get over it. I...." He stuttered, startled by her question. He began to pace the room.

"You want more than that." Pain shot through her body as a thick layer of guilt began to stir inside her heart. He knows, he hates me, he always has.

"Stop it. I don't want to argue. Can you please just look at him? Soon everyone will be here."

Her knees shook, and her legs had no feeling. Her arms hung like dead branches at her sides. As she rose to her feet, her shoulders slumped and could barely carry the weight of her drooping head. She stared down at her shoes.

"What's wrong with you? You look dead too. Is that what you're trying to do?" he sighed, his eyes narrowing. "Whatever you're trying to pull, that's not going to bring him back. He's dead. You see. He's right over there, dead."

"Stop!" Her heart started to pound, and she knew she had to get out of this suffocating room. One sheep, two sheep, three sheep....

"Sheridan!" he grabbed her roughly by the shoulders and shook her as her thin hair whipped his cheeks. "Why didn't you listen to Mum, why didn't you? Look what you've done. You should never have left him. Now no one will ever be able to understand you. Now we're left with you."

Her body felt ready to buckle; she didn't want to die in a church. She had to get out. His words were stripping her of her skin; she could almost taste blood on her lips. Blood, his blood welling up within her bleeding heart. It was all her fault.

"You're just going to have to find a new saviour somewhere else. He's not coming back. Da's...." Shaken with the finality of his own words, his body collapsed onto the nearby pew, and he began to weep.

No tears dropped from her eyes as she turned and headed for the door. The door slammed behind her, and she didn't look back. She had buried everything else, and she could bury this too. If she refused to feel then maybe infinity would come.

Amy Hilborn

completion

i want
to weep – and wash you from
my broken-slate heart
restoring it to some sameness
of what it was
(i cannot)

Judith Byl

My Friend

the way unfair treatment of a puppy hurts
hearts, squeezes them, wringing out sympathy
like blood dripping into a rain-filled
puddle and diffusing;

so I feel about you.

Ruth Reitsma

(untitled)

a red door, and a brown body
black shoes, a newborn baby
one king standing tall, mirrored with twenty-one kings
just as brave and just as tall
a fountain through glass
a son, a daughter
a father, my mother
inhibited reliant standing taller
O ever will I be
evasive in this network no smaller
than the vision of hope.

Brandon Hiddink

Missionary

We forget
what we forced
on you while
we were wearing white
cotton dresses and our
men were reading sagely
from their leather-
bound books of truth.

We forget
what you accepted
while we accepted
your too-salty bread
and boiled water.

We forget what
was so important
for us to tell you.

And you saw
the big square paper
with the coloured blobs
that represented us.

We were big and pink
and you were a
tiny green speck.

And now
you believe
what we forced on you
and we forget.

Jenny Noordegraaf

Wind

Ah, the lovely winds of Hamilton.
They blow the hair away from my cheek,
curl around the handlebars of my three-speed bike,
tug -playfully- at my backpack flap,
send chilly love-shivers up my open sleeve, and
I ... smile...
As I bike into them.

Anita Brinkman

“A Time to Search, and a Time to Give Up”

caught in the cycle
time to be born; time to die
‘What is in between signifies nothing.’
anxiety, absurdity
to be, to simply be
a stone simply exists
to authentically be!
Impossible: eat-drink-die
embrace meaningless
thesis-antithesis-synthesis(just another thesis)
demand the answer to ‘The Question’
being becomes nothing-
-nothing is left to hear the answer
negation of solutions is a solution
simply be
embrace the absurdity!
—or don’t, doesn’t matter, eh?

Dan Horton

companionship

a winter night not unlike
a group of seven christmas cards,
you and i good friends wrapped
in scarves fitted with mittens we
knitted for each other chins
ducked as we walk together on the
 crisp cool crust of snow on the laneway
 wander
 gathering drifts
 rubber soles of boots pressing
 stamps into snow
 that will soon be
 forcibly forgotten
 by the wicked
 wind that whispers
 into my ears sweeps
 between the two of us licks
 skin of my neck as the
 menace that it is but i

 force my shoulders up
 listen to your voice which is much warmer than
 the wind that threatens to
 undo
 me

i look to our feet so i can match
 my steps
 with yours
and in this moment
 we are children we are (best) friends
 we should have a heart-
 warming soundtrack
 to match the harmony of our stepping
 we would win any threelegged race
 maybe even over anne&diana

we walk together
this winternight.

i look at the stars

which are silver in the stark
sky—who could not on such
a night as the startling white
penetrates the outer concentric
sphere of ether pocked by peepholes
flowing light from the ultimate and radiant beauty
too still too pure too real to
even be real infinity that overwhelms
in gasping loveliness.

Judith Byl

Letting Go

As I grow older
and time passes by
changes start taking place
but I'm afraid to fly.
Letting go is hard to do
comforts must be left behind
each time I'm called to say good-bye
fear forms in my mind.
But though I oft despise it
time still travels on.
I must learn to use it well,
before I find it gone.
I will grow older
and time will pass by.
Life will change forevermore
and I must learn to fly.

Osanna Deelstra

Captured

An old beat-up camera hangs heavily
around my neck
and waits patiently for that
perfect moment.
It focuses on wine glasses
filled to the brim
on a dining table set for eight;
It zooms in on a gold band
placed delicately on a trembling finger
as tears fall silently to the floor;
It follows a baby girl
smiling as she places one foot
in front of the other,
wobbly legs taking their first steps
toward a mother's outstretched hand;
It scans the sky at sunrise
as colours mix in fantastical arrangements
and again at sunset,
when the light slowly
fades into the horizon;
It is there for the first dance,
silver ties and long dresses;
For the child dressed as a pirate
on a cold October night;
For tinsel and twinkling lights
meticulously placed on an evergreen;
For a goodbye embrace
before the final boarding.
Through an old beat-up camera,
I learn what it looks like
to love,
to laugh,
to rejoice in new beginnings and part
with things of the past
And
with the push of my finger
and a flash of white bright light,
these lessons are forever captured
in motionless images.

Christine van Hasselt

“It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year.”

The room is plastic with holiday cheer. An unnatural coniferous tree looms in the corner, its branches sagging with the weight of gaudy plastic baubles and assorted, aging homemade decorations. Several floral couches are scattered throughout the room, their pink bouquets looking hideous beside the red of the Christmas candles. Chairs and square tables are crowding the room. Varied casserole dishes and glassware will be spread over the elongated table along the far wall, and coats are piling up on top of the piano (someone has) recently pushed into the corner; no music this Christmas. People are milling around conversing with each other as you enter.

“Merry Christmas Aunt Lynda...yes, school is going well...nope, still single–

Merry Christmas Uncle Fred...yes, I am enjoying school...no, no boyfriend yet–

Grandma...it’s good to see you, Merry Christmas...I’m well, and yourself?

Aunt Millie, Merry Christmas...close, it’s actually my fourth year...no, this is not an engagement ring–

Mom, where do I put these cookies?

Hey Tyler, you look so tall! How many fingers-old are you this year?

Aunt Jayne, Merry Christmas...no– I don’t have time for dating...no, I’m still in school..actually not high school, university– ”

You arrive. Kitchen sanctity.

You place the cookies on the counter and search for some menial task to occupy yourself in this food-filled haven. Yes, the styrofoam cups should be washed; nothing can ever be too clean. You wash slowly; dinner is still two full hours away. If you close your eyes, you can imagine the warm water of the sink sliding over your entire body as you sink into a...bubble-filled bathtub? Your muscles are physically beginning to uncoil. Maybe you will survive this–

“Oh! Aunt Jayne, you startled me...I know styrofoam cups come wrapped in plastic, I just thought they looked a little dusty...Sure, I can man the oven for you...Not a problem.”

Ah ha. A real task. Now you have an actual reason for lingering in the kitchen. You pre-heat the oven and insert the first two casseroles to be heated– one tuna and the other a shepherd’s pie. This job will occupy you until dinnertime. Swiftly joy fills your heart, and an attitude nearing thankfulness wells up; you are glad you have

come. Who else would have rescued Aunt Jayne from this two-hour task of heat-filled, intensive oven watching, and willingly too? You are a solitary being, ready to tackle thankless chores. You are a carrier of the Christmas reunion-kitchen-torch, passed from one generation of women to the next. You are practically first in line for the Nobel Prize in Attitude (you are aware that such an award doesn't exist, but feel that it should). You are...

...raising your arms in a triumphant salute.
"Uncle Fred! I'm actually just stretching."

You watch his retreating back, seeing instead the horrified expression his face had worn moments earlier. You know that Aunt Millie will hear about this one, and that she'll finally agree with Uncle Fred that not having children (those time-consuming, money-depleting, strange creatures with vaguely familiar physical features and mannerisms) had been the right decision. He might tell your mother too. Yet another unexplainable event that your mother can wield against you during one of those argue-about-nothing moments the two of you have had recently. All of this feels like recycled puberty. Your self-pity weighs you down suddenly, and your eyes feel wet. Wet like the snow outside the window. It's Christmas time. You shouldn't be crying, you should be caroling or wrapping presents, or—

"Aunt Lynda! No, I'm fine...it's just the heat in here, and maybe the dust...don't worry, I'm fine...really."

Perfect. Now, not only are you perceived as an emotional basketcase who abnormally stretches in the kitchen, but you have also finished heating all the casseroles. It is dinnertime, time to leave the kitchen. You timidly exit, searching for an empty chair. The only one you spot, the one you will be sitting in, is made of brightly coloured plastic and is surrounded by young humans. You console yourself with the realization that being forgotten actually works to your advantage; now you can be the one making patronizing small talk.

"Anna...ANNA. Your father is already in the car, Hurry Up. We're going to be late, I just know we're late. Your Aunt Millie will get there first with Her tuna casserole and then everyone will think mine is unoriginal – HURRY Anna – and Sherry is bringing a boy with her this year. Aunt Lynda has been bragging non-stop and asking about you of course—"

As you slide into your coat, you scowl into the hall mirror. You know that this year will be the same as last year.

